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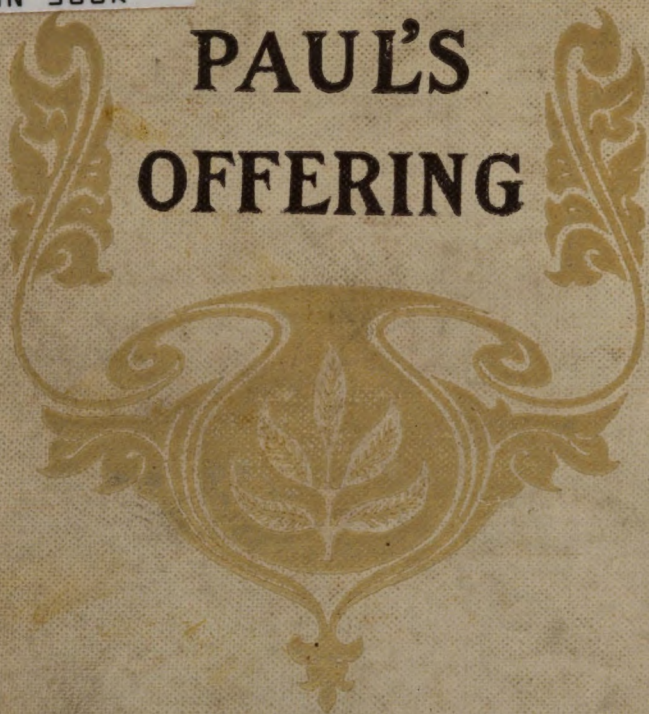


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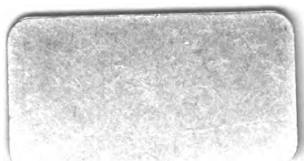


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PAUL'S OFFERING



KL 2274



Paul's Offering

and

Gates Ajar

Stories by

Joseph H. Wynne



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These stories, sketches from life, written directly for the young, have the unusual characteristic of being of equal interest and profit to readers of any age, the serious and light-minded alike.

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CHAPTER I.—THE EASTER LILIES.

A girlish boy of thirteen, or thereabout, small of size and looking younger than the sum of his few years, is hardly the sort of a youth to set down as the "hero" of a story. But so we shall install Paul Markham, confident that even the more critical readers will be ready to accord him the title, too, when they know him better.

He is not the favored child of wealth, and we do not meet him surrounded by elegance in a home of luxury. No, nothing of this sort. He is a poor orphan, quite alone in the world, as far as he knows and anyone else cares, and

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he is taken in charge by a childless couple, plain people though well-to-do, who have agreed to clothe him and send him to school for the odd jobs and errands he can do after school hours.

It is on one of those early after school hours we look in upon him, a crisp, cold afternoon in March. He is in the "summer kitchen" of the Morris home—at this season used chiefly as a place of storage for kindling, of which Mrs. Morris seems always to require an enormous supply. A great heap of the light, dry fuel is lying in one corner now, and it is Paul's special business in hand to pile it up neatly.

But this is not the work in which we find him engaged. On a narrow strip of board placed across an open barrel are ranged four little flower pots, in each a sprouting bulb;

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the boy is bending over these and watering them carefully.

"Oh, wouldn't mother love to see them!" he says to himself, a ray of gladness lighting his sad little face at the thought. "Her very own lilies, coming out for Holy Week, to be on the altar, just as if she were here herself to tend them! How lucky I had just these even four good ones when all the rest got froze! There'll be ever so many more to the roots of these when they're done blooming too; then I can save lots for next year and ——"

Just then the door of the inner kitchen jerked open and Mrs. Morris looked out.

"Well, I declare to gracious!" she cried. "Is that the pottering you're at now? Dribbling water over every blessed thing and making a mess instead of tidying up and doing your

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chores? And just see how you've soaked those shavings!"—her voice taking a higher pitch, as she peered into the barrel, into which the little streams from the pots were running—"Now what's the fire to be started with in the morning, I'd like to know. Here, get this truck out of the way this minute. I declare I've a good mind to give you a dressing down too, you wouldn't forget in a hurry, you good-for-nothing little moke, you!"

Paul, flushing and trembling tried to obey but his nervous efforts to remove the four pots at once and still hold the pitcher, which in his confusion he had not the presence of mind to set down, so irritated Mrs. Morris, that she altogether lost control of her but lightly governed temper. She rushed forward, gave the boy a smart box on the ear, tossed the board

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off the barrel, while the pots crashed to the floor and their contents scattered all about.

The child gave a wail of agony, and the woman's anger cooled at the sight of the ruin of his most treasured possessions. But the harm was done now, and to lament wouldn't mend matters, her practical mind promptly suggested, so she sharply ordered him to "stop his howling and clean up the muss, or it would be worse for him," and returned to her work within.

Poor little Paul! it was a renewal of the heartbreak of three months before, when the quiet little loving mother, he so much resembled, was borne to her last resting place. His beautiful lilies, that were thriving so nicely, the very same his mother had put so carefully away the year before, which she herself had

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cultivated! It had been her one consolation to raise and nurture plants and flowers to adorn the altar of their modest little church on the successive feasts. In her poverty she could not make money offerings to the glory of God in the beauty of His house, but she could get roots and slips of plants for the asking and by-and-by, her little son had the happiness and honor of carrying them to church, with gorgeous crowns of vari-hued flowers.

Everybody knew and admired Mrs. Markham's plants and the dainty bouquets of her arranging were like no others. Often too, these sweet tributes of charity found their way to the bedside of the sick, in some poorly kept flowerless home. Many an aching eye had turned gratefully from the contemplation of some delirium provoking pattern of cheap wall

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paper to the floral gift of Mrs. Markham, shedding beauty and breathing fragrance in the dreary room.

But now the busy hands were folded under the sod of the churchyard; the tender heart buried like the flowers she so loved, in their season of germinating, and like them too awaiting a glorious resurrection.

And the little, less skillful hands, that would essay to carry on the mother's pious work, were now ruthlessly robbed of their sweet task. Scattered earth, fragments of crockery and the budding lilies with roots exposed were all that remained to little Paul, for his weeks of patient care and watching. Shattered too was the fond hope that by another season he would have a collection like his mother's,

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which had all but a few bulbs been distributed to neighbors after her death.

Trembling in his misery and blinded with tears, the poor little fellow, nevertheless hastened to obey Mrs. Morris' injunction to "clear up the mess." He stumbled about and finding an old fruit basket gathered up the wreck of his plants, carrying the basket out behind the shed to empty it on the rubbish heap. But this was too much, and now far enough away from the ears of Mrs. Morris, he set down the basket, leaned his head against the side of the outbuilding, and gave way to his wild passion of sorrow.

"Hello, there Paul, what's the matter?" called a young voice, and the chubby face of a little girl about the boy's own age appeared above the fence separating the adjoining yard.

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Mrs. Morris, from within, was observing everything. She was a kind-hearted, if hasty, woman, and already, her irritation subsiding, she was reproaching herself for the destruction she had caused, and grief brought upon the little orphan she should have tried to comfort instead of afflict. She was turning over in her mind how best to make amends, when she saw the little neighbor come to the fence and enter into conversation with the sobbing boy. Then her face clouded again.

"There, now, I'm getting it down the banks, I suppose," she commented with a sniff. "Of course he's telling that Bond young one that I abused him shamefully. Thrashed him half to death like as not. Then she'll run with the news to her ma, to be sure, and the next thing Mrs. Bond will be around the whole neighbor-

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hood telling everybody I'm murdering the poor orphan by inches, and it'll be no surprise if his death's laid to my door any day. Wonder if she'd do no more than give him a slap on the side of the head, if he'd gone and wet up a whole barrel of shavings on her, and not a blessed thing about to start the kitchen fire with tomorrow morning. Oh, but that's altogether different, of course, it's me that's got the bother, and she has his sniveling story. There, the girl goes in and—yes, out comes the mother just as I expected. 'Twon't do for me to call the boy in now, either, for if I do, she'll think it's to keep him from telling the worst. No, I'll just let them get through their talk and then slip over there and see what she has to say about it. I'd just like to know how he pictures me anyhow, now my

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back's turned. There she goes in too; she must have gone through him in a hurry. Now he's putting that basket under a box. Wonder what he means to do with it. Well, I'm right sorry about those roots of his anyhow, he set such store by them, and it was just the way his poor mother used to do. I'm afraid she wouldn't thank me so much as she did when she was dying and I offered to take the boy, if she could see how out of patience I get with him sometimes. Well I mean to do right by him, too, only I don't know how to go about it; I guess that's the trouble mostly. There now I'll run in to Mrs. Bond's a minute while things are fresh in her mind, and see if I can find out just what he's been saying."

CHAPTER II.—IN THE SHADOW OF A CRIME.

Mrs. Bond had her hands in a bowl of flour making biscuits for tea, when her neighbor "slipped in" and took a chair beside her bread board. The caller had no need to bring up the subject she had come to discuss, Mrs. Bond did that immediately.

"Soon as I get my hands out of this, I'll get you some pots to take over to your little boy, Mrs. Morris," she said. "Emma's down cellar looking 'em up now. I told him a minute ago I had some he could have. Those plants will grow if they're put right down again. Too bad he upset them, they were doing so nicely, and he feels so awfully about it."

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"Did he tell you how it happened?" asked Mrs. Morris, eagerly.

"Why, yes, he told Emma he was a watering 'em on a little board he has across a barrel and the board tipped, so smash went the lot. I thought maybe he wouldn't like to ask you to get more pots, lest you'd think he was careless, so I told him I'd give him as many as he needed."

"And did he really say nothing of the hand I had in his accident, when he was telling about it?" asked Mrs. Morris, amazed.

"About you having a hand in it? Why, no, we understood from him plainly that it was his own fault."

"Well, it wasn't then, at all," Mrs. Morris said with emphasis, determined now to be as generous in self-condemnation as her

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charge had been reserved in accusing her. "I got mad at him for watering the things over the shaving barrel, so I boxed his ears and overturned the pots. I was sorry the next minute but I thought sure he had been giving me an overhauling to you folks, so I said to myself I'd better run in and let you know how it happened."

Mrs. Bond set down her biscuit cutter on the table and herself on a convenient chair.

"Well, now, Mrs. Morris, you do surprise me! What a strange child that boy must be not to put a mite of blame on you, even to Emma when she was asking him about the trouble. I tell you, ma'am, you ought to appreciate such a child as that and be easy with him, too, no matter what happens. I could see the poor little fellow's heart was

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just breaking but not a word did he say against you, not even to let us know you were around at the time he had the accident. Now I hope you'll be good to him to make up. Here, Emily, bring Mrs. Morris those pots—you'd better put the roots down yourself, carefully, or they may not set again."

"No," said Mrs. Morris, slowly, "I don't think I'll take those pots of yours, Mrs. Bond, thanking you just the same. It was too bad of me to let my temper go like that at the poor motherless creature, and him so gentle and mild, always trying his best, I can see, to do everything to please me. I have a duty to do by him, too, just the same as his mother had, now I've taken it on me to bring him up. His poor mother, with those plants of hers, was teaching him to do what he

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could for the church and it was my place to follow on and encourage him in it, instead of rushing out and smashing things because he hadn't happened to think about a handful of shavings getting wet, when he was doing that watering. It's a poor example to give him, anyway, aside from the other harm done. No, I'll do all I can to make up for that tantrum I let myself get into. I'll give him fifty cents to go and get some of those pretty decorated china pots I see in the stores and let him set his plants in the sunny dining-room window, where I can look after them a little, too. I feel ashamed of myself, I do, Mrs. Bond. That little fellow has made me. There he was covering up my faults and I thinking all sorts of meanness about him and everybody."

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So it was under the influence of a very decided change of heart Mrs. Morris went back home. It was now almost dark and she could hear Paul fumbling around finishing his work in the shed. Lighting the lamp she turned to take up her pocketbook intending to get the money for the pleasant errand she had planned in atonement to the boy. The pocketbook lay where she had left it, on the table of the sewing machine, but picking it up she noticed that it felt strangely light, and opening found it empty. She had left in it some small change, a silver dollar, a two dollar bill, and one of the new Columbian coins then just issued. While she had stepped out those few moments the purse had been rifled of its contents.

Here was a new turn of affairs; she scarce-

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ly knew how to deal with it. Mechanically she called Paul in from the outer kitchen. He came quickly but timidly. He had washed his face at the pump to remove the traces of tears before the genial Mr. Morris would come home, and have his good humor disturbed by the unpleasantness. But the cold water had only increased the redness about the little fellow's pleading eyes and Mrs. Morris in spite of the new suspicion dawning on her, felt pity for the shrinking little figure, which came at her call just within the doorway.

"Paul," she said, studying him closely. You needn't be afraid, I'm not going to punish you. I want you to tell me who was in here while I was over at Mrs. Bond's a few minutes ago. You were out there, weren't you?"

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"No one was in," he answered. "I heard the door close when you went out and no one came in till you did, for I was in the kitchen all the time."

"Did you come in yourself?" she said, still scrutinizing him.

"No, ma'am," answered Paul. "That is, I didn't come into the room really, but I looked in when the city bells struck five to see what time it was by our clock; you told me to watch this noon for you said you thought ours was slow a little, and so it is—six minutes."

Mrs. Morris sighed and was thoughtful. Was this boy a thief, with all his mildness and forbearance? There have been such, full of gentle, insinuating ways but shockingly dishonest. She certainly could not

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have such a one about her, yet might she decide his guilt and cast him off all in a moment? No, she would wait and consider; talk it over with her husband that evening anyhow.

Meantime her heart was again hardened against the suspected child. All the sympathy for his grief in the destruction of his plants faded with the thought that after all she was harboring a viper, which withheld its venomous sting only to plant its fangs deeper. The boy that could speak fairly of her to a neighbor and rob her a moment after was even more of a menace in her house than one who would take revenge in loud accusations and complaints. He had only looked into the room to see the clock, and under the clock shelf stood the machine with

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her plump pocketbook lying upon it. There was but one way to account for the disappearance of the money—but nevertheless she would wait. Mr. Morris must weigh the case, so she simply told Paul curtly to go finish what he was doing, and went with troubled mind about her own task of preparing the evening meal.

CHAPTER III.—COUNSEL FOR DEFENSE.

Darkness had almost settled down when the boy stepped into the narrow yard again. As he did so his attention was attracted by a low whistle from a lad about his own size perched on the rear fence.

"Say, kid," said the boy on the fence, "come here a minute I want to ask you something."

"What were you a bawlin' about out here awhile ago," as Paul drew nearer, "when I was taking in Bond's paper?"

"Oh, nothing much," said Paul, recognizing the carrier of the evening paper, who supplied its patrons in the neighborhood. "I had an accident, that's all, and I felt bad about it."

"Aw, come off," said the youth on the fence.

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"Own up now, wasn't the old hairpin in there givin' you a lambastin' or suthin'?"

"No, she wasn't," said Paul, stoutly, "and you needn't call her names either. She's been good to me, Mrs. Morris has, only I can't somehow get things done to suit her all the time. I let the water run into the shaving barrel from my plants and she couldn't like that very well could she? So, of course, it was my fault when they got upset and broke."

"You'll get upset and broke yourself if you stay around tryin' to please her long," said the oracle above. "You're an awful ninny to poke yourself in with them two old folks. They'll never let you have a bit of fun long as you live. They'll make a regular old Dolly Varden out of you, that's what they'll do, and blame you for every darned thing that goes wrong

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with them. I'll bet if that old woman broke a dish in there now, she'd say it was your fault, 'cause you'd made her nervous or suthin'. I had an old grandmother an' you couldn't even sneeze around our house while she was livin' lest you gave her some sort of a fit. I tell you what I'd do if I was in your place, kid, I'd just light out, get a job, and let them and their blamed old things go to thunder. I can get you a paper route if you want to take it, and give you a start in business. What do you say, is it a go? Hold on now, don't speak altogether."

"No," said Paul, emphatically, "it's no 'go,' as you call it. I promised my mother to stay with the Morris's as long as they wanted me, and to be the same to them as I would to her

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when I got to be big. And I'm going to do it, too."

"Oh, my eye, what a nice little rock-a-bye baby it is! Well, if you're chump enough to stay there and get banged round by them two old cranks, what ain't a thing to you, it's your own funeral, of course. I'm sorry to see you at it, though, blamed if I ain't, an' here's a half for you to prove it." Saying which the sympathetic youth tossed a silver fifty-cent piece at Paul's feet, and slipping from his perch hurried down the alley.

"There," he said as he emerged into the street, "I got rid of that coin all right I guess. I ain't so green as to go passin' no marked money, an' that Columbian half with the initial on it, is a dead give away, if she starts

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out to look for her stuff. That little softie will go no farther then the corner confectionery with it and sure as she catches on she'll swear he emptied her purse, no matter how he tries to get out of it. Oh, yes, I'm awful sorry for him. I'm so sorry I plank over the ducats to show it—He! He!" and he indulged in a grotesque series of gambols and chuckles.

Paul, amazed, picked up the bright new, silver piece the street Arab had thrust upon him. He had not time to speculate or examine it when he was called by another young voice, and turning found Emily Bond on the back steps of her house beckoning him toward her.

"Is it all right, now, Paul?" she said. "Did Mrs. Morris give you the money for the new

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pots and do you think your flowers will grow again?"

"Mrs. Morris give me money for new pots?" repeated Paul. "Why no, she didn't say anything about it. Your mother said she was going to lend me some."

"So she was," said Emily, "and told Mrs. Morris so when she was over awhile ago, but Mrs. Morris said she was sorry for the accident and that it was her fault, so she was going to give you the money to go over to the bazaar, and get some of those nice decorated ones, soon as she went back home. Haven't you been in since?"

"Why, yes, she called me the minute she came in and lit the lamp. She never said a word about the flowers, though, only asked me if I'd been in the house or if anybody else

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was while she was out. Then she told me to go and finish up here."

"Well, I'm afraid your plants will die, while she's making up her mind," said Emma. "I tell you, Paul, you had better hand that basket over and I'll set them in ma's pots. Then if Mrs. Morris gives you that money for the others you can get them a size larger so that the common ones will slip inside. That will be the nicest way anyhow. Don't you think so?"

"Oh, yes, that will be grand, and I thank you so much, Emma," said the grateful boy as he gave her the basket with its dubious looking contents.

Mrs. Morris, as she laid the table for the evening meal, thought over the situation deeply. She arrived at the conclusion that nothing

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should be said about the rifling of the pocket-book at once, that her husband should not be apprised of the loss until she was able to fix it upon Paul more conclusively. Mr. Morris was an easy-going, good-natured individual who always thought the best of everybody, until contrary evidences multiplied and piled up sufficiently to raise a doubt in his generous mind. This was the worst degree adverse opinion ever attained with him; he became "a little bit afraid there was something queer about so-and-so. They were first-rate people, of course, but they had odd turns about them, somehow."

Mrs. Morris, on the other hand, was quick to suspect and as prompt to condemn, often too, on very slight grounds for opinion either way. To be just to her we must say that

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she was equally ready with approval where she thought it belonged, and liberal in amends where she had wrongly accused. But she was extreme in both directions. With her people were all like the little girl who had the little curl: "When they were good, they were very, very good, and when they were bad they were horrid."

Knowing her husband's lenient disposition, she could hear in advance his "Pooh, pooh, woman, who put that in your head? How in the world do you know the child took the money, just because you left him in the shed when you went out and it was gone when you got in again. That evidence wouldn't hold water a minute, if you put it before a judge, and now I'll just play judge in this case, and discharge the suspected pilferer." No, it

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wouldn't do to tell Mr. Morris yet, she would wait at least over night and investigate.

She passed the evening in a state of feverish unrest. Every movement of the suspected boy seemed suggestive of deceitfulness. The incident of the afternoon had increased his usual timid shrinking, and when after awhile he quietly withdrew to his little room, he was already fully condemned in the mind of his accuser.

An hour after he had retired, Mrs. Morris, a new thought striking her, suddenly started up and tip-toed to his room. Opening the door noiselessly and finding he was sleeping soundly she cautiously entered.

CHAPTER IV.—CONVICTION AND SENTENCE.

Before a small statue of the Blessed Virgin, on a stand, which the boy had arranged with little religious pictures and tokens, and called his altar, a tiny night lamp was burning, dimly lighting the place. The room was furnished with what was worth keeping of his mother's modest household effects, and was neat and comfortable. On the same bed where he had slept from infancy the orphan lay, its coverings the work of the tender hands, that could never again occupy themselves with the loving service.

Mrs. Morris, her heart full of outraged feeling over the base ingratitude of which she believed herself the victim, never glanced a sec-

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ond time at the pale little face on the pillow ; she went to the clothing lying over the back of a chair by the bed, and began nervously examining the pockets.

Again, to do our hasty friend justice, we must say that as she searched the pockets she had a distant but distinct hope that they would have no proof to give against their owner. But alas—in the second of the receptacles she touched, she felt a large coin, and drew out, almost with an audible exclamation, a Columbian half dollar!

Holding it in trembling fingers, she came panting to the sitting-room, where Mr. Morris was seated absorbed in his evening paper.

“Richard,” she cried, “Richard, that boy up there must be got rid of at once. I made a mistake in taking him, and you were right

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when you said I ought to go slow in such a thing, or I might regret it. But I felt so sorry for the poor mother, when she was going with no one to leave him to, I thought I'd ease her mind and take risks on his turning out all right. The risks were more than I counted on though, and I can't stand it another day. He's too smooth to be sound and too sweet to be wholesome. There, let me tell you what he's done,"—as the good man attempted to stay the torrent long enough to investigate its source. "He's a regular little sneak thief, that's what he is. And I know what I'm talking about when I say it. He stole every cent that was in my pocketbook—over four dollars—when I left it there on the machine, while I stepped into Bond's, for not more than ten minutes this afternoon. Here's that Columbian half dollar

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that you put the little initial on; see it there in the ship's sail, plain as day. I was keeping it for a pocket piece, and now I've just been up to that little scamp's room and taken it from his pocket. You can't say I was in too much of a rush about making up my mind this time," and she dropped the coin on the table before him, sinking into a chair with spent breath.

Mr. Morris spread his paper over his knees, his genial face clouding. "Now see here Dorothy," he said, "let's look into the thing quietly. What's the use of getting excited? It's bad that he should take the money, to be sure, that is just supposing he did take it, but we're not altogether ruined anyway. Four dollars won't quite break us, you know. But here let us see—couldn't you have dropped that money

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around somewhere's or couldn't some one else have got hold of it instead of the boy?"

Irritation was added to Mrs. Morris' already disturbed state, for indeed the good man's leniency of judgment was wont to be exasperating at times, where claims of justice were pressing. She shook her head, impatiently exclaiming:

"I knew it! I knew you'd be hunting round for some way to whitewash the little vagabond! I thought of that the minute I came in and found the money gone, and him in the next room all the while, with not a soul else around to touch it. But I knew what you'd say no matter how clear the case was, so I just waited to go through his pockets or examine his room before I told you. No, sir; you can't convince me that half dollar rained

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into his pocket, so there's no use trying to argue it. Of course he's got the rest of it hidden around up there too."

A sadly disturbed, even distressed look settled upon Mr. Morris' usually placid countenance. He recognized that the occasion demanded some severe course in the determined mind of his wife, and his kind heart shrank instinctively.

"Yes, he stole the money," she went on, "there's no manner of doubt about it. And now all there's to be said is we can't keep a thief in the house with us. Out of here, bag and baggage, he's got to go."

"But hold on now, be a little reasonable about it, can't you?" interposed her husband. "You're so quick, you know, so awful quick, my dear; quick to sit down on folks as to pick

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'em up. Suppose now you do something rash about the boy, and then be sorry by-and-by, if it turns out he's innocent—"

"You can guess away at his innocence, Richard, all you choose, but my mind's made up," she rejoined sharply. "I'll not have him around here a minute longer than I can fix things to get rid of him. I've never had to do with thieves in my life so far, thank God, and I'm not going to begin now. No, no, I know what you're going to say; but I can't do it. I won't undertake to reform him. I never had the bringing up of children and I wouldn't know where to begin the job of making over one that had gone wrong so young. He's got to go without more ado to an institution where we will have our hands washed of him altogether and not be held responsible for him now

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or afterwards. I know very well there's no use asking you to attend to it, for you'd weaken the very minute he cried to be let stay, or said he'd do better. Indeed I'm not sure but he'd be able to persuade you he didn't know my Columbian half dollar was in his pocket at all. You just don't say anything to him or interfere in this matter, and I'll see to getting the business fixed up myself."

Mr. Morris sighed, as he folded his paper and laid it away. His habitual serenity was upset and he had no more inclination for reading that evening.

"Well, Dorothy, do what you think best," he said, after a pause. "You took the child on your own responsibility and I did not oppose you. Now you want him away; but do you really think it is right to deal with the

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boy's future in that way? Besides, where are you going to send him? You know there is no Catholic orphanage about here, and what may become of his faith in the public asylum?"

"I can't help that," said his wife, firmly. "He's been instructed and made his First Communion and for the rest he must look out for himself, that is all. I can't make him religious any more than I can make him honest by keeping him around here. The chances would all be for his growing up a regular canting hypocrite, that you couldn't trust as far as you could see him, if we let him go on decorating altars with one hand and emptying people's pocketbooks with the other. The place for him is where he'll be kept under strict watch and rule, and off there he goes, if I live till to-morrow."

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And Mrs. Morris did live till the morrow and as she had determined early began proceedings to transfer her charge to the county asylum.

She notified the authorities that she had a friendless dependent boy at her house, of whom she wished to be relieved and after some little trouble secured an order committing him to the asylum, or poorhouse, as it was more commonly called. A message to the institution brought answer that the boy would be sent for in the afternoon of the day following.

Meanwhile little Paul went about his tasks almost cheerful again. Emma Bond had repotted the lilies and reported well of their prospect for a new lease of life, and he was so far greatly consoled.

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Mrs. Morris said nothing to him about the loss of her money, nor the conclusion she had reached in his regard. Mr. Morris too was silent, and for him singularly serious, though this Paul did not notice, or noticing, did not dream of the reason.

Paul missed the half dollar from his pocket, but thought it had dropped out when he had undressed and had rolled into some crevice. From time to time he made a little search for it about his room, making up his mind to go through nooks and corners more thoroughly on the Saturday holiday.

CHAPTER V.—“OVER THE HILLS TO THE POOR
HOUSE.”

The first day following the afternoon of disaster Paul was allowed to go to school as usual but the next morning, Mrs. Morris told him shortly that he was to remain at home. She did not tell him why and he wondered but did not question.

The asylum conveyance was to come for the boy in the course of the afternoon, and Mrs. Morris had decided that she would not inform him of his fate until the last moment. She feared that as a matter of course he would protest and appeal, and determined to give him as little time for this as possible.

She also decided not to tell Mrs. Bond until

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about the same time as Paul's information. At that time she thought it best to let her know what was about to occur, as the houses being so close she would certainly hear the boy's outcry and perhaps undertake to interfere and delay the disagreeable transaction. Therefore she decided to explain matters to her just before the unpleasant affair came off and warn her to keep away until it was over.

Mr. Morris did not come home to dinner that day, contrary to his fixed custom, and Mrs. Morris was strangely without appetite for the meal. Paul, however, did justice to the more than usually nice lunch she set before him. Soon after she went into Mrs. Bond's to prepare that good neighbor for what was to follow, Paul going out to a job

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of tidying up in the yard, to which he had set himself in the morning.

He was not long at work, when the chubby, piquant face of Emma Bond appeared at the fence, a look of terror in her eyes and scarcely able to articulate with excitement.

"Oh Paul, she cried," almost gasping the words. "Don't you know? Didn't she tell you they're coming in a little while to take you to the 'sylum?"

"To the asylum?" repeated Paul gazing at her bewildered. "What do you mean Em? I don't understand you?"

"Why, Mrs. Morris—she's in our house now telling ma. She says she found all her money gone out of her pocketbook that was on the machine, when she went back in, the

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other day, and then afterward you had some of it in your pocket and now she's going to have you taken to the asylum, 'cause she won't have you around any more. Oh, say Paul, how did you get that money? I know it wasn't hers anyway; I'm sure it wasn't. Can't you tell her you didn't do it, can't you make her know it somehow so you won't have to go away!" and the kind little girl burst into a passion of weeping.

Paul had grown very pale as he listened. He remembered Mrs. Morris questioning about his having been in the dining room while she was out that day, also the disappearance of the half dollar from his pocket was now explained. She believed him a thief and would send him away because of it!

He shook like one in an ague, and coming

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to the fence caught his sympathetic little friend's arm with a wild clutch of agony.

"Oh, Emma, what shall I do!" he cried. "I will die if they take me to that awful place. I didn't touch the money, never. That fifty cents I had Joe Greene gave me. He came and threw it to me over the back fence that evening, because he was sorry I lost my plants. Oh, how can I——"

"Go and tell her!" cried the girl, pushing him toward the house. "There she's gone in home now; run quick and tell her, you didn't do it, and how you got that money. I'll tell ma and she'll go and speak to her too."

As Emma darted into her own back door, Paul rushed into that of the Morris' house, meeting Mrs. Morris as she entered from the side.

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"Oh auntie!" he cried, brokenly, "I didn't take that money, truly I didn't. A boy gave me that half dollar and I never touched your pocketbook at all!"

Mrs. Morris had not noticed Emma Bond's sudden exit while she was talking with her mother, nor know that the little girl had met and told Paul the tale she was relating; so she at once concluded from his outburst, that his own accusing conscience made him at length fear suspicion and that this was his way of seeking deliverance. Her heart hardened, if possible still more at the supposed trickery and his appeal met only a torrent of angry words.

"Ah! it's time you got around to trump up some story about it," she said. "But you'll find it won't do you a bit of good now,

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young man. I hate a sneak above all things on earth, and a sneak-thief, even beyond that. So off you go out of this house as quick as——”

A conveyance had rattled up noisily and stopped before the house, while she was speaking, and now a loud peal at the door bell interrupted and called her to admit the asylum guard who was to take the boy away.

“Here’s the man you’re to go with,” she resumed, returning with the official to where Paul stood, with white face and clasped hands, dazed as from a blow. “Go up to your room and gather up whatever you want to take with you. Be in a hurry about it, too, for I don’t want that wagon standing before the door and people wondering what’s going on here.”

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But Paul did not do her bidding for once. Instead he threw himself upon her, locking his arms about her, bursting into tears and wild petitions for forgiveness and mercy.

"Oh, auntie, auntie, don't send me away. Don't, oh don't, I can't bear it! I didn't do it at all, truly, truly I never did! Do let me stay with you and I'll do everything for you always! I'll be a good boy and I'll work for you when I get big. I'll do anything you want me to. I'll——"

"Here! here! no more of this," the woman cried, shaking him off angrily, and as he still grasped at her dress, seizing him by the collar and flinging him headlong into the hallway. "I just expected this turn out, and if you don't pick up and be off inside of five

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minutes, you'll get out without even your hat on."

"Yes," said the waiting asylum agent gruffly. "I have no time to spend at high tragedy shows. Get your things as this lady tells you and come along in less than five minutes or I'll have to take a hand and help you."

Paul gathered himself up and half blinded by his tears staggered up the stairway to the little back room he had called his. The slanting afternoon sunlight shone brightly in through the one window, casting a halo about the modest but comfortable furnishings, the precious heirlooms, so sacred to him. He must part from all now, for what could he carry with him to the asylum but school books and clothing.

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On his little altar so tasteful in its arrangement, stood the image of our Blessed Lady, with hands extended as though inviting him to her, and with a wild appeal for help he went forward and cast himself on his knees.

"Oh, dear Mother in Heaven," he cried, "have pity on me. Oh, make them know I didn't do it. Don't let them take me away from everything—from you. Oh mamma, mamma"—to his own dead mother—"can you not help me too? Oh, ask our dear Lady to hear me. My God, oh my God! if you will only have mercy on me and save me from this, I promise you my life. I will give my life all to you!" And with streaming eyes and hands upraised in agonizing petition, the poor tortured orphan knelt before

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the representation of the Virgin Mother, the calm, smiling face, seemingly as unheeding of his anguished prayer, as the earthly friends who had so hardened their hearts against him.

CHAPTER VI.—A FRIEND IN NEED.

But "all is not lost that is in danger." A loyal little friend of Paul's in the house next door, was very busy in his behalf all this time.

Emily had burst in upon her mother with vehement assertions of Paul's innocence, and pleadings for her to intercede with Mrs. Morris for him. But Mrs. Bond could not be persuaded to undertake what she believed so useless a task.

"I tell you, Emma, I'm as sorry for the poor little soul as you, but that woman's got her mind made up and I know her well enough to know once that's done, there's no use trying to change her by reasoning. For me or anyone else to go to tell her the boy got that

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piece of money from another wouldn't do the least mite of good. She'd believe no one, less perhaps the thief himself came and owned up to her. The child's got to go now sure; maybe after awhile when her temper cools, the thing can be cleared up and she'll go and take him back again. But my opinion is she sees she's made a mistake in taking him in the first place, and is glad to get a good excuse to ship him anyway."

Emma standing twisting her fingers and sobbing, caught an idea from her mother's words—slight as the encouragement they carried.

She darted out of the side door and was on the sidewalk in a moment. Before the door of the Morris' house stood the asylum conveyance, and she knew the dread moment had

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arrived when her poor little friend would be torn from his last semblance of a home, to become a mere number in the desolate dwelling of the charges of public charity. If she was to help him at all she must do it at once, and simultaneously with Paul in his chamber she sent up a prayer to the Help of the Afflicted, a scarcely coherent "Hail Mary," as she glanced wildly around.

Her heart gave a great bound, as at the corner of the street, on the opposite side, she saw Joe Greene, the newsboy, in loud argument over "a trade," with two other lads. At almost the same instant that her eyes fell on Joe, a big policeman came sauntering along his beat on the adjoining cross street.

A minute more and Emma was at the officer's side grasping his arm and exclaiming:

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"Oh, Mr. Policeman, hurry up and get that boy in the brown jacket. He's the one that stole Mrs. Morris' money, and she's sending her own boy—one she adopted, I mean, off to the asylum, 'cause she thinks he took it. See, there's the wagon at the door come to take him now. But Paul never touched the money, that boy there did it; he brings the paper to us right next door, and I saw him go through the entry between when Mrs. Morris was out. Oh, please, sir, please don't let them take Paul for it when he didn't do it at all. Please, please don't!" and the eager girl's tears, restrained during her recital, burst forth anew.

The big officer looked surprised and a bit puzzled, but he was happily a man of ready wit and resources. He took in a good deal of

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the situation at once, and, supposing the little girl had actually seen the lad she charged commit the theft, he went across the way, and in a moment the heavy hand of the law was resting on Joe Greene's slender shoulder.

"Come, my boy," said the officer, "I guess I'll have to take you for a little walk with me."

"What fur?" said Joe, giving a fruitless jerk to free himself. "You can't take me up. I ain't done nothing."

"Well, we'll have to see about that," said the policeman, "so you'd best behave mean time and come along."

"No, I won't, I don't have to, till I know what you want me fur. What you think you want to run me in fur, anyway?"

"Oh, you're not in jail just yet," said the

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officer, leading him along, while his companions stood back in terror and amazement. "It depends a good deal as to how you own up, and what that woman whose money you stole, has a mind to do about it."

"I didn't swipe none o' her stuff," asserted the young prisoner, stoutly, and the precocious, hardened little face upturned, had on it only a look of stubborn denial. "'Twas her own' kid what took her money, so it was;" then remembering that he was not to be supposed to know anything of the loss—he added, 'that's if there's been any money took from the house you're pointin' at.'

"That's all very well to say," said the policeman, still leading him on, "but it just happens that there's a witness against you, young man. That little girl over there, who lives next door,

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saw you go in there while the lady was out and help yourself, to whatever you took from her. You'll have to come along till we see how much it was and what she wants to do about it."

The idea that his crime was witnessed had not before occurred to the young culprit. There were no windows in the Bond house on the side next the Morris residence, save one little dormer high up in the attic, and he at once concluded this must have been Emma Bond's point of observation. Conviction and consignment for years to the reformatory now stared him in the face, and before that vision he quailed perceptibly. Then his keen, abnormally shrewd mind suggested a loophole of escape. He would plead necessity and sue for mercy, so forthwith he gave way to all the

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emotion of terror he really felt, and broke into loud confession and protestations of repentance.

"Oh, Mister, please don't put me in jail, we wus starvin' at home, and I couldn't help it. Here, I've got all the money they wus in that pocketbook but ninety-four cents, and the Columbian fifty what I gave back to her kid. Don't take me up fur less'n a dollar. I'll pay her back what I spent out of my paper money 'fore the week is out. 'Sure's death I will."

"Well, come in here, and see what the lady has to say," said the officer, and he led him up to Mrs. Morris, interrupting the voluble account of the whys and wherefores of her course with the orphan boy, which she was giving the asylum messenger.

"Here's the chap that took your money,

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ma'am," said the policeman, pushing his prisoner before him as he entered. "And by good luck he's got the most of it with him too. He says he gave back a half dollar, I believe it was, to your boy. Now it's for you to say, whether or not you want to enter complaint against him. If you do of course, I'll take him into custody."

"Oh, please, missus, please don't," broke in Joe with a shrill whine which he tried hard to make resemble genuine weeping. "We wus so hungry at home, me an' all my brothers and sisters" (He had a single brother and one sister both older than himself), "we wus so cold an' hungry, an' when I see you go in next house, I just thought I'd look in your glass door, and see if your boy was there and ask him to give me a piece of bread or something."

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Then I see that 'ere pocketbook a lying on the machine an' no one 'round an' I thought I'd borrer a nickel out of it, an' then when I opened it I just couldn't help it, I had all the money out in my hand a lookin' fur the nickel, when I thought I hear your boy comin' in back, an' I just stuck the money in my pocket and skipped out, 'fraid he ketch me. But I'd put it all back again if I'd only had a chance, honest to goodness I would, an' here it's most all now missus, all but ninety-four cents, an' I'll earn the rest an' pay you this week if you'll get this here cop to let go on me. Crost my heart I will, missus; hope to die if I don't."

Mrs. Morris stood dumbfounded. A full sense of the injustice she had done Paul and the awful unmerited punishment meted out to him rushed in upon her. Never for a mo-

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ment had she doubted his guilt, and the sudden discovery of his entire innocence was an overwhelming shock to her. She was appalled at the cruelty of her conduct, for, faithful to her disposition to go to the limit whichever way she turned, she now blamed herself to the uttermost for her hasty judgment and merciless condemnation.

All the necessities and patient endurance of the poor orphan she had pledged herself to care for, now stood before her enlightened vision in full view. She seemed again to hear the blessings which the dying mother invoked upon her, when she promised to give home and care to the friendless child. She saw the timid, gently bred little fellow meekly endeavoring to cater to her brusque, inconsiderate ways, and always striving to please and

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serve her; so grateful for every trifling kindness, so uncomplaining under the undeserved rebukes she had so often dealt out to him. And now she had capped the climax of persecution; she had laid the last straw on his burden by branding him a thief and putting him through the terrible ordeal of preparing to leave what remained to him of home; worse yet, to be shut away from those practices of religion, which she knew were so dear to him. She was conscience-smitten and overwhelmed. Even poor Paul in his agony of grief upstairs was scarcely more stricken at the moment than the erstwhile unpitying woman below.

The policeman looked curious, the asylum official impatient, and the whimpering young criminal more apprehensive, as Mrs Morris stood before them in speechless amaze. Emma

Paul's Offering

Bond on the steps, bareheaded and shivering, peered anxiously in through the door partially unclosed. At last, Mrs. Morris found voice, but it was only to give way to a torrent of self reproaches, throwing herself into a chair and burying her face in her hands.

CHAPTER VII.—TRUE REPENTANCE.

The good woman's repentance was as loud in expression as it was deep in sentiment.

"Oh, the poor lamb!" she wailed, "As innocent as the angels above, and I have nearly killed him! I wouldn't let him say a word to defend himself, but had to put him down for a thief and order him out of the house, like a dog or a desperado. I couldn't even let him touch me or give him time to go upstairs; I had to throw him around like he wasn't a creature with human feeling. Oh, my poor boy, my poor child, what shall I do! How shall I ever have the face to ask you to forgive me? Your poor mother and God in Heaven looking down on me this day—what

Paul's Offering

have they to say to the treatment I have given the orphan they left to me? Oh, God pardon me, God pardon me, I——

“No,” sharply to the man from the asylum who ventured to intrude inquiry as to whether the boy was to go with him now. “Of course, you’re not to take him. Didn’t you hear, what that little rascal there said! The poor child had neither act nor part in it. You, policeman, take the young villain out of here. It’s bad enough without the sight of him before me. No, I don’t want any prosecuting or charges, I’ve done enough of that this last while. Take him out of here quick. That money, leave it there, anywhere, till my husband comes. I never want to see it again, with all the trouble it’s made. Oh, the poor child, what shall I say to him. Here Emma,

Paul's Offering

Emma Bond," noticing the little girl on the steps, "Run and tell your ma to come in. She must go up and pacify that poor, heart-broken little fellow, I can never do it; I'm too done up myself."

She sat swaying back and forth bemoaning her rashness, as the three strangers withdrew and Emma Bond ran home for her mother. Mrs. Bond gathered sufficient idea of the new developments from the little girl's scarcely intelligible account of what had happened, to understand what was required of her, by the time she reached her neighbor's house.

"Oh Mrs. Bond, isn't it too bad!" exclaimed Mrs. Morris at her entrance. "I feel dreadfully about it, that I was so hard on him and worked him up so, when he'd done nothing at all to deserve it. And he was in such a state

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too, poor child, over going from us. I suppose he's getting his little things together upstairs and crying fit to break his heart, poor lamb. I'll have to quiet down before I can talk to him, and think what I had best do and say. Will you go up and tell him it's all right now, and he's not going; that—that little imp's been in and acknowledged he took the money? Tell Paul how sorry I am and that I am feeling so bad I'll have to wait to talk to him when he comes down."

Mrs. Bond gladly accepted her commission and went up to the boy's room.

Paul had not moved from the spot where he knelt to pour forth his wild petition to Heaven, for justification and protection. He knew nothing of what was going on below, or how speedily and fully his prayer was an-

Paul's Offering

swered. It had not taken more than a quarter of an hour for the whole series of occurrences that had resulted so happily, and the boy still sobbed and repeated his frantic prayers when he heard Mrs. Bond's ascending steps on the stairway.

He thought then that the fatal moment had come, when he would be torn from the little all that was so dear to him. He tried to rise and obey, for obedience however hard was a habit well formed with him, but his limbs seemed paralyzed and he was still on his knees when the door opened and Mrs. Bond appeared.

"Don't fret Paul," she said cheerily, "it's all right now and you're not going away. Mrs. Morris is sorry enough too, for being so harsh with you, and she'll tell you so presently when

Paul's Offering

she comes to herself. That miserable little Joe Greene got nabbed by a policeman and he came in and owned up to taking the money, so you're—Oh, good gracious, I believe the child's going to have a fit or something!" for while she came forward to soothe him, Paul with a wild cry fell forward at her feet, unconscious.

She lifted him to the bed when the frightened as well as remorseful Mrs. Morris hurried in. The latter was in such a panic that she could be of little assistance, so Emma was dispatched for a physician, who fortunately lived close at hand.

In the doctor's skillful hands it was not long before the boy was brought out of the faint which had resulted from the sudden shock, though of relief, to his overstrained nerves.

Paul's Offering

But while he revived so soon the doctor looked serious.

He had excused the excited Mrs. Morris from the room before Paul opened his eyes, and when the recovery was so far accomplished he promptly enjoined the patient from talking or asking questions.

"You're all right, my little man," he said, "and nothing's going to happen to you. Let this do for the present, and your good friend will tell you all you want to know after awhile. Now you're to keep perfectly quiet and go to sleep as soon as you can, else we'll be having you sick on our hands, and you'll have to take any amount of bitter medicine. There, there now," gently chafing the cold fingers which nervously clutched his hand; "your friend here," motioning to Mrs. Bond, "is going to

Paul's Offering

stay with you while I go down and speak to the other lady."

The doctor's verdict given to Mrs. Morris below, was that Paul was in danger of an attack of severe illness, perhaps even affection of the brain. He learned from her what had happened to so prostrate the child, and then advised, since she had figured so prominently in the cause of the attack, that she keep aloof from him for some hours, lest her presence renew his excitement. He would call again in the morning and hoped by that time to find the danger passed.

It was now evening, and about the usual hour of Mr. Morris' home-coming from business. He entered just as the doctor left, and Mrs. Morris, with tears of relief told him the story of the afternoon's happenings.

Paul's Offering

The good man had come in feeling down-cast and sad. He had reproached himself, as he thought, too late, with allowing his wife to act on the dictates of her hard, hasty judgment and send the boy off for a first offense. But he was a man of peace, and he knew full well, that he might bid goodby to that if he tried to compel his better half to put up with the companionship of a "criminal," as she had pronounced their little charge. She would only make both Paul's and his own life miserable with her suspicions and charges from that time on. If he yielded to her, as he had done, he reasoned that she might miss the child, relent and want him back again, so it was with melancholy curiosity to know her state of mind, he had come to meet her.

To say that his kind heart rejoiced when

Paul's Offering

the truth was learned is weak description of his gladness. A great weight was lifted from his mind and he experienced a happiness that even surprised him. For the first time he realized the real affection he had learned to feel for the boy, and the pity, so akin to love, his trials awakened, added to the tender feeling. He calmed his wife with a few kind words, telling her he knew "her bark was worse than her bite" and that she'd find a way to make up to the lad for it all, when she got around to it. He hoped she'd remember this affair, when she met another chance to jump at a conclusion, without waiting to see where she might happen to land. And now, as he hadn't got mixed up in the trouble, he was going up to let Mrs. Bond off duty and try his hand at nursing a child for the first time in his life.

Paul's Offering

Paul had dropped asleep and Mrs. Bond was stealthily leaving the room as Mr. Morris reached the stairs. She motioned him back, and advised him to have his supper before going up, then he could sit with the boy the evening. Half an hour later found him with his evening paper, inseparable at that time—posted at the bedside.

CHAPTER VIII.—PAUL'S OFFERING.

For perhaps an hour more Paul slept on peacefully. The hue of health had returned to the cheeks and lips awhile ago so pale, and his repose was that of restful slumber. Still it was with a nervous start, he at length awakened, the look of a hunted animal in the clear eyes from which the lids suddenly lifted.

Mr. Morris laid down his paper and came closer to the bed. He passed his hand caressingly over the boy's head and said gently:

"Now, my lad, they tell me you're not to talk for awhile, but nobody said I wasn't to have the privilege, so here goes for a little story all about you and me, and nobody else.

Paul's Offering

"You see, Paul, it's just like this, the wife, she's quick and quick-tempered accordingly, but good at bottom—there isn't anybody on earth better hearted, that I know. There's just that difference between her and a bottle of soda or champagne; it's good when it goes off and is all in a fizz, but she's—well, she's a bit unstandable,—a new word, maybe, but it fits—till the fizzing's done and she settles down. But this is neither here nor there, you've got to know her now, my boy, I guess about as well as I do. Well, you see she blamed you too quick the other day, and now she's just as sorry as she was mad before that newsboy came in and owned up to his doing the dishonest business. Because she's so ashamed of herself and afraid to upset you is the reason she has not come to

Paul's Offering

tell you so herself. I had to give in to her Paul, about letting you go away from us, but I never meant to leave you in that miserable place where you'd be brought up a heathen, if for no other reason. I was going to smuggle you off to some Catholic boarding school, soon as the storm blew over. But thank God the air cleared before you got away at all, and now I know I can fix things different, more as I'd like to. I can't cross the wife too far, you know, my lad, because we've got to live together all our days, and I couldn't live a wrangling nohow. Now, as she feels, she can't do enough for you, and I'm going to see that all's done that can be before she has a chance to fall from grace of repentance, or get up her dander again about any little thing that may

Paul's Offering

come along. Tomorrow bright and early, with God's help, I'm going down to the court and take out adoption papers on you, so that you'll be ours and what we have yours in spite of ourselves. I have a little something in this world Paul, thanks to the good Giver for the same, and nobody in particular with claims on me by right of kinship, so I'm going to provide myself with an heir, first thing tomorrow. Then, my lad, when the next school term begins, if you would like to go off to college, you have only to say the word. You're my son, you know, from this time forth, and the best I can give is none too good for you. Oh, come, don't cry, dear, it wasn't to make you sorry but glad I've been talking."

"And I am glad, oh so glad," cried Paul,

Paul's Offering

rising with the strength, happiness lent him, and throwing his arms about Mr. Morris' neck. "I never was so glad, never in my life, not even while poor mamma was alive. I never knew my father, you know, and I will love you as I would have loved him. And dear Aunt Morris, I knew it was because she didn't know, and it looked so bad for me, I don't blame her. I will be so good to her she'll be glad I stayed and indeed I'll love her too. But, dear, dear uncle, I do want to go away to college. Because, you see, because—I hope you won't object"—and his voice sank to a whisper—"I want to be a priest. I thought of it long ago, since before I made my First Communion, and today when I was in all that trouble, I promised God and our Blessed Lady, that I would

Paul's Offering

be one, that I would give my whole life to God, if He would save me then; and see how He has done it. Say you will let me keep my promise, uncle, I don't want ever to be rich or have money, only to be a priest dear uncle, only that."

"And please God so you shall be my dear child," said Mr. Morris, releasing him from his embrace and laying him back on his pillows. "You are young yet to be making up your mind like this, but you are not an ordinary boy by any means, my little Paul, and who knows what great designs the Almighty may have for you. You shall go to college and then to the seminary if you will, and I will pay every cent of your course. Another thing, my boy, I'll try to be more worthy of the honor God gives me in such a trust. I

Paul's Offering

have been a careless man about religion, always too wrapped up in the business of this world to give the next much thought. But now I'm going to turn over a new leaf, though it is rather behind the popular season for that sort of thing. It's more years than it would edify you, lad, to count over since I've been to my duty, but if God spares me to this Easter I'm going with you, and it'll be months and not years with me thereafter. You have shown me, young as you are, what it means to be a Christian, turning to God in trouble, and bearing without malicious resentment, the wrongs done you. That's what I haven't seen much of before, and I tell you, it's a winning argument for religion when it does come along. You'll never preach a more effective sermon, if you carry out your idea, than you've

Paul's Offering

done right here, little Paul. But now you must go to sleep again; or I'll get Jesse for rousing you up. No, don't be afraid, I'm not going to leave you," as the boy clung lovingly to the big hand he held in both his. "No siree, not tonight. I'm going to bring in a stretcher by-and-by, and lie right here by the bedside to watch you."

Joy is exciting, it is true, but such joy as Paul now felt is soothing too; with a glance toward his altar, and a wordless prayer of thanksgiving, he closed his eyes and was again soon wrapped in restful slumber. Mr. Morris went down with good report to his wife, who in turn, conveyed it to anxious Mrs. Bond, and then sought her pillow with contented mind to enjoy the repose of the ultra-righteous.

Paul's Offering

Mr. Morris brought his "stretcher" into Paul's room as he had agreed, and laid himself down to watch according to the balance of the contract. But despite best of intentions his term of watching ended in just five minutes, at which time percisely, he lost all his bearings in the sea of oblivion, though that he was safely anchored in port all the while was made evident by such sonorous snoring as would have roused anything animated, save, fortunately, a tired boy in healthful slumber.

CHAPTER IX.—PATHS OF PEACE.

The waking next day was the ushering in of a new life for our well tried little Paul. The doctor pronounced him quite out of danger of the threatened illness, and further agreed that he should be allowed to leave his bed in the course of the following day, though he must keep quiet and stay in doors for a little longer.

Mrs. Morris came up full of self reproaches, and cried over and petted him until he thought he must be dreaming that his own mother had come back again. Mrs. Bond brought in such dainties as would tempt the palate of any boy in whom a remnant of boyish appetite still lingered,

Paul's Offering

and the company of Emma and Fred, her cunning little four year old brother, was promised him when he should get down stairs in the afternoon.

What a happy day it was from dawn to closing! Mrs. Morris begged to have the Bond children stay and all share the little feast she prepared, for Mr. Morris' return, "in honor of our boy's being made our own by law as well as choice," she said.

Paul, when he had become able to think connectedly, had wondered exceedingly how the guilt had been so suddenly fixed upon Joe Greene and a confession secured from him. On this head, of course, Emma Bond was able to give him full enlightenment.

"You see, Paul," she said, "I was most crazy when I ran in to ma and she said noth-

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ing could be done for you and wouldn't go and see Mrs. Morris about it. Then I began saying 'Hail Marys' for you, as fast as I could and ran right out into the street, though I didn't know why, when who should I see on one corner but Joe Greene, getting in a fight with some boys, and right across the policeman coming. I knew 'count of what you said about that half dollar he gave you, that it must have been Joe took the money, when he was going through the entry from our back door, so I ran and told the policeman, and he made him own up to it. I guess the policeman and Joe thought I saw him sneak in and get the money, but I didn't say that—I only knew he must have done it."

"Mighty good thing they took you up as

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they did, and that you've got such a well balanced thinking apparatus, my dear," said Mr. Morris, when Paul made his staunch little friend repeat the story for him. "If that young sharper hadn't supposed you actually saw him, he would have stood out and denied it to the last. The officer would hardly have interfered either on your mere surmise of his guilt; altogether the thing wasn't just a happening, I'm thinking."

"We were both praying to our Blessed Mother, for the same thing, Emma and I," said Paul, thoughtfully, "and she made the way out. That's how it was."

A beautiful Easter, was as the fullness of morning's glory, to the new day that had dawned upon Paul's shadowed life. Mr. Morris kept his word about his own spiritual

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renovation, if we may so call it—and was at the Holy Table with his wife and Paul, to the pious joy of the latter, and the almost ecstatic satisfaction of his better-half. Her husband's religious indifference had been one of the worthy woman's constant sorrows. Her tireless arguments and urgings in this direction had been wholly without avail. Even for "peace sake," Mr. Morris could not be persuaded to go to church save semi-occasionally, or when he happened to "feel like it." And as for approaching the sacraments it was only at missions he was led so far.

It had never occurred to Mrs. Morris that a little less of the letter of the law and more of its spirit, would have aroused in her husband the approving sentiments she had

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longed to inspire. It was thus the gentle boy had unconsciously guided, and the woman saw and humbly learned a lesson, thinking the while how the assurance "and a little child shall lead them," was here renewed.

Paul's lilies had blossomed out luxuriantly according to their promise, and to crown his happiness that day were the modest altar's greatest adornment, just as his mother's carefully tended flowers had ever been. Emma Bond had found on investigating the wrecked plants the day of disaster, that the roots were really but little disturbed, the earth adhering to and covering them so that when put in new pots, and set in the sunny window the lily buds went on with their process of opening out as though nothing had happened to interrupt.

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"I divided the lilies up," said Paul to his little friend as they walked home from the church together. "One was for mamma, one for uncle, one for auntie, and one for you Emma. There was just enough to go round, but I wish there were more, because you should have had most. Only for you I wouldn't have had them or anything else to-day, you know."

"Oh, never mind," said Emma quickly, pleased, but not wishing Paul to grow sad with his painful reminiscences. "What about yourself, though? Why didn't you leave some of us out and have one to represent you? I thought you wanted to have an Easter offering so bad."

"And so I had one," answered Paul, with a dreamy smile. "A good big one too—at

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least I hope so. I am going off to college, you know, after the holidays, and—well, I will tell you all about it by-and-by.”

Emma knows all about it now and they have great times comparing notes when the tall seminarian comes home for his vacations. Mr. and Mrs. Morris are exceedingly proud of their boy, and their love and reverence for him is singularly touching.

It would be quite apropos here if we could send Miss Emma to a convent, but this is where the dispositions of real life usually differ so widely from the nice arrangements of fiction. Emma recognizes that her sphere of usefulness does not lie within cloister walls, and she is fitting herself to be the very type of true Catholic womanhood in the life of distraction to which she is called. Next

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to Paul in Mr. Morris' eyes, there is nobody like "that smart little girl next door," as he still calls her, though she is now a young lady grown. He has talked the matter over with his adopted son and as the latter insists that he doesn't want to be an heir to any considerable amount, or have the burden of wealth to shoulder with his ministry, Emma Bond's name figures conspicuously in Mr. Morris' will, both by his own next choice and Paul's eager urging.

And brave, true-hearted Emma is all unknowing of this; while she rejoices in her young friend's holy choice of vocation and prays faithfully for his success and perseverance, she never dreams that his renunciation is to be her gain, that she has become a comparatively wealthy heiress through "Paul's Offering."

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CHAPTER I.—AN INVITATION.

"Oh, mamma! Just see—a letter from Aunt Harriet, your Aunt Harriet, you know—and she wants Hattie and I to come and spend the vacation with her, make her a good visit anyhow! Aunt Syb says Hattie can go; now do read it, quick, mamma, and say I can too," and the little speaker dropped the letter of invitation into her mother's lap and herself into a neighboring rocking chair, fanning herself vigorously with her big sun hat.

Mrs. Morton raised her hands half in surprise and half in deprecation of her daugh-

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ter's impetuous outburst. She was a placid little woman ordinarily, but Bessie's clamor and the astonishing circumstance that her obdurate aunt, who she thought had forgotten the very existence of herself and sister, should send them a message of any sort, was enough to disturb her usual calmness. She took the already opened letter and unfolded it with a visible tremor. It was addressed to herself and older sister, the "Aunt Syb" Bessie mentioned, who, after reading, had despatched it to her for perusal. The epistle was brief and pointed, and after a few preliminary commonplaces ran thus:

"So I think it best, girls, to let bygones be bygones. Of course I still consider your marriages and all connected with them, a sad mistake, but I am getting old now and I don't want to close my

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days at variance with anybody. I hear you have each a well-grown girl. Now, I'd be very pleased if you'd let them both come and make me a visit. I need not tell you what the place is here at this season, and I guess you can judge they'd find Hope-dale a pleasant spot to spend their holidays in. Write soon and let me know when I may send to the station to meet them."

"Well, this is an odd turn of affairs, surely," said Mrs. Morton, when she had finished deciphering the cramped writing, and glanced over at Bessie's bright, expectant face. "But now, don't ask me for a decision about letting you go immediately, dear; there are many questions to be considered and I must talk the matter over with your papa and Aunt Sybil. I think likely it will be arranged as you wish, though, so don't fret." And she patted the brown head beside her as she arose to attend to some

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household duties preparatory to a visit to her sister's for consultation. The two dwellings were not many squares apart and an hour later the sisters were engaged in their momentous conference.

The letter from Aunt Harriet Storrs might well astonish them. When some sixteen years before Sybil and Caroline, now respectively Mrs. Reynolds and Mrs. Morton, had "disgraced" their staunch Puritan connections and ancestry by marrying Catholics and embracing their religion, Aunt Harriet had looked upon herself as equally outraged with her reverend brother, for to cap the climax, the father of the recreant maidens was a minister, and a very representative one of the bigotry of his sect. Rev. Dr. Winchell was a widower with only these

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two daughters; he had been a stern, harsh parent, and on the girls' marriages he promptly severed even the formal ties existing with his children. The sisters were cast off and forbidden to attempt to claim even acquaintance with him again. Shortly after he remarried and the estrangement of old ties became more confirmed. The young couples, residing in a distant city, never heard from their father and seldom of him again, until some years later they by chance saw mention of his death and burial in one of the daily papers. Their Aunt Harriet was very like her brother in general character and temperment, so it was little wonder that her overtures for reconciliation, and at this late day too, should occasion her nieces no slight surprise.

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Fortune had perhaps dealt fairly but scarcely generously with the two women. They continued to maintain respectable, but never attained what are called comfortable circumstances. Mr. Reynolds had a little business of his own which, closely attended to, returned a moderate income. Mr. Morton was a skilled mechanic, and his wife took care to make the most of his monthly earnings. The wives from their humble dwellings in the noisy city street often sent back a wistful thought to their country home; not that they would have exchanged their present lot for the old one. They were devoted wives and tender mothers, but above all Christians and Catholics, true to their sacred profession. Dear to them as would ever remain the haunts of their child-

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hood; they would not have accepted the enjoyment of even fairer scenes than Hopedale could boast for the blessed knowledge of the true religion they now possessed, nor the opportunities for practicing it their residence in the city afforded. The possibility of contamination from influence adverse to this religion, which might befall their daughters in the projected visit formed the central topic of the debate at which we have just seen them closeted.

Long and thoughtfully they deliberated, but at last it was decided, as Mrs. Morton had anticipated, that the young folks should go. They were to be duly warned how to ward off any thrusts Mrs. Storrs might make at their religion, and if the situation became very trying notify their parents,

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when they would be promptly brought home. Aunt Harriet was a childless widow and very well off, it was believed, so it would not be policy to reject her advances until it was positively discovered that sinister motives were concerned. Accordingly another week saw the two delighted girls on their way to the depot accompanied by Mrs. Morton, Mrs. Reynolds being detained by the slight indisposition of one of her younger children. The trunks of the young travelers went on before in Mr. Reynold's delivery wagon; they could not afford carriage hire and like needless expense, and such was never indulged in by these frugal people.

As they seated themselves in the car with lunch baskets beside them the two young

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girls looked as fresh and bright in their neat gingham dresses as though they had been attired in the costliest traveling suits. With her good-by kiss, Mrs. Morton repeated the injunction already given them to be as pleasant and obedient to their grand-aunt as possible, and to carefully avoid any contention over religion, but to firmly refuse to listen to anything said against their faith, and to write home if attacks upon it were introduced and persisted in. The girls promised and waved their handkerchiefs gaily as the train pulled out.

The journey was a long one, but too novel an experience to the young travelers to permit them to find it wearisome. Hattie Reynolds, though but fifteen, and the senior of her cousin by only about a year, was al-

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ways wont to assume a status of young ladyhood and general information above unpretentious Bessie, and indeed the latter did look just the childish, unsophisticated little creature beside nonchalant Miss Hattie that that nowise backward young lady decided her to be. So as the rapid express dashed along through meadowland and wood, through village and town on the route, Hattie had her time well occupied pointing out and explaining the commonplace sights to the wondering little girl, who listened as attentively as though the speaker were really so very much better posted than herself.

Everything was of interest to them, from the dingy rows of freight cars and impatient locomotives on the sidings, to the wild flow-

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ers nodding here and there among the weeds and grasses that bordered the track in the open country. They wished they could stop and gather the pretty blossoms, pet the timid lambs as they scampered off through their pastures affrighted as the train drew near, and wade in the shady brooklets where the cattle stood knee deep in the cool waters, looking so picturesque and contented.

CHAPTER II.—A PARTING OF WAYS.

It was past sunset of the long summer day when the train reached Hopedale. A little anxious about being able to single out their aunt among the crowd around the station, they stepped down to the platform; but before they had time to look about them they found themselves being embraced by the sharp-eyed old lady, who declared she saw their faces at the car window and even recognized them without waiting to note their dress and general appearance, of which their mothers had taken pains to give her full description. In a few minutes more they were comfortably seated in the roomy old carriage and being whirled away over the

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mile of distance that lay between the railway station and Mrs. Storrs' home.

The old lady was talkative and observant, but so kindly in manner that in a very few minutes the girls felt quite at ease in her company. She asked many questions about themselves and their families, but made no unpleasant comments in regard to any circumstance the answers revealed to her. So the young folks had entirely lost sight of all their vague anxieties by the time they were ushered into the large, old-fashioned dining room in the mansion, half villa, half farmhouse, to enjoy the cozy supper awaiting them.

Then suddenly came a moment of trial. The test was simple in seeming, but in experience none the less severe. At the head

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of the table beside the dainty little tea service sat their aunt, scanning them with renewed interest as they approached, washed and brushed and with hats removed. They had been accustomed always to say grace before seating themselves at the table, and now with a feeling of overwhelming embarrassment the thought of the duty occurred to both. As Hattie reached her chair and saw Mrs. Storrs' gaze turned upon her, courage failed her completely and she sank confusedly into her seat; Bessie paused, however, and notwithstanding her emotion, deliberately made the sign of the Cross, repeating the blessing as usual inaudibly and then took her seat, in no little trepidation at her own temerity.

Bessie's action naturally drew the atten-

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tion of Aunt Harriet away from her cousin, and that young lady seized the moment of diversion to make on her breast a most unobtrusive little likeness of the emblem of salvation, and so was ready to begin the meal with a less disturbed conscience. Contrary to their expectation and to Bessie's apprehension, beyond a quick glance of scrutiny Mrs. Storrs took no notice of the little Catholic devotion which her younger niece presumed to introduce at her supper table.

As is always the case, whether in well-doing or in ill-doing, after the first step was taken those succeeding and dependent follow naturally and without effort. Rising from the table Bessie made her thanksgiving with far more composure than had attended

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the preliminary devotion, while Hattie on the other hand, felt still greater difficulty in fulfilling the duty, and passed into the hall out of the range of her aunt's observation ere she ventured upon a hasty attempt at its discharge. In the privacy of the pretty room allotted for their use, before retiring that night the girls discussed the reasons for and against making profession of faith in this manner.

"Now, don't get to preaching, Bess, that's a dear," said Hattie with a yawn, half of drowsiness and half in affectation of indifference; "we are not required to make ourselves and our religion hateful to people by parading piety before them at every chance."

"I don't see how you can call saying our

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usual prayer at table, making a parade of piety, or how doing so could possibly be displeasing to anyone," replied her cousin.

"Pshaw, you know very well Aunt Harriet is opposed, and very decidedly too, to all our religious practices. I am sure it fairly made her crawl to see you 'cross yourself' as she would call it."

"But Aunt Harriet knows that we are Catholics," maintained Bessie, "and she must have made up her mind to put up with our ways. If she came to our homes she would not expect to have to give up whatever devotions she is accustomed to just because we do not believe as she does. Of course papa and mamma would let her do as she pleased as long as she did not try to make us follow her ideas."

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"Oh, that's all very well about what she would expect and about what we would allow her, but it's altogether different when it comes to put your theory into practice. I can just about imagine how she despises our creed, and how disagreeable the sight of our devotions are to her, and I am quite determined for my part not to trouble her in this way."

"But you know we promised, Hattie," persisted conscientious Bessie, "that we would be very careful not to yield in matters of religion to please our aunt, and, anyhow, I don't see how you could bear to omit anything pleasing to God, just to satisfy any one's prejudice."

"Oh, fiddlesticks, Bessie; you are such a tiresome little thing; what do you want to

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take such a solemn view of every commonplace little action for? There is no real obligation about this saying grace at any time, and I'm not going to pose for a regular devotee here, nor did I make any promises to do so. Of course if you want to think you've made such an engagement all right, you can go on with your excellent program, I've nothing to say against it; will even admit that it is very heroic perhaps and all that, but don't go bothering me any more about it. I tell you once for all I am not going to follow your example, and now let's stop quarreling, say our prayers and get to bed, for I am beginning to be awfully tired with the day's excitement."

So the cousins agreed to disagree as to their course of conduct in the Storrs man-

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sion, and each adhered firmly to the policy chosen this first evening. Bessie religiously said the usual grace at each meal and Hattie as religiously—in another sense—omitted it. No further occasion for showing their divergence occurred, however, until the following Sunday.

They had inquired, but not of their aunt, and learned, as their mothers had anticipated, that no Catholic church was yet established in Hopedale; in fact, there were scarcely a dozen Catholic families living in the neighborhood, and these few could only hear Mass at a mission five miles distant, and which a priest visited but monthly. Hattie and Bessie had arrived on a Tuesday evening, and so had had time to accustom themselves to the thought of the first churchless

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Sunday they ever remembered passing, when, at the breakfast table that morning, their aunt suddenly announced:

"Well, girls, I am going to get ready for meeting now, and as there is no church of your kind about here, hadn't you both better get ready too and come with me? It will help you to pass the day if nothing more, and we will meet people there to whom I would like to introduce you."

This was a wholly unexpected proposal, and the two addressed looked up blankly for a moment in silent surprise. Then Bessie recollecting Hattie's disposition to complaisance hastened to answer:

"Oh, really, Aunt Harriet, you must excuse us. We would be happy to accompany you anywhere else, but it is not allowed by

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our Church to go to other places of worship.

"But as there is none of your own here," said Mrs. Storrs, seemingly in true surprise. "I beg your pardon, my dear, but surely your religion cannot require you to pass the day like heathens when it has no church to offer you where you happen to be."

Bessie blushed and looked confused; she did not know how to make her aunt understand the situation without speaking disparagingly of her religious opinions. Hattie she thought always knew more about things than herself, and she turned her eyes toward that young lady appealingly.

But Miss Hattie's face plainly disclosed that she was not going to come to her aid. She wore a look of defiance, indeed, but Bessie, not Mrs. Storrs, was the opponent.

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As the aunt paused for a reply to her inquiry, Hattie confounded her puzzled little cousin by answering sweetly:

"Why, of course, Aunt Harriet, as things are, we can go to church with you today if you would like to have us. There is no law at all in our Church against it, but Bess here is a great little stickler for forms, as you have already probably noticed. If she prefers to remain at home, I, at least, will be pleased to go with you."

"Thank you, my dear," said Aunt Harriet, rising. "Of course you will suit yourself, Bessie, but now you'll excuse Hattie and me, for we must go at once to begin our preparations. And she passed from the room as Hattie had already done while she was speaking, leaving Bessie overwhelmed

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with distress and astonishment still sitting at the breakfast table. Recovering herself in a few moments, the little girl arose with alacrity and hastened after her cousin.

CHAPTER III.—A STROKE OF DIPLOMACY.

Hattie was standing brushing out her long fair hair before the tall mirror on their dressing table. Bessie entering threw her arms about her exclaiming:

"Oh, Hattie, you won't go, surely you won't go with aunty! Just think how wrong, how wicked, how dreadful it is to do so! What would they all say at home if they could see you do it?" And poor, anxious Bessie began crying bitterly.

Hattie impatiently extricated herself from the clinging embrace. She considered herself very ill-used to have to listen to these remonstrances.

"Well, if you are not the greatest little

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silly," she said, resuming her toilet. "Anyone would think you were a perfect saint and I the worst of criminals to hear you go on. No not that exactly either, for saints were always kind and gentle toward sinners; they never kept pestering and hectoring as you do. But console your tender conscience which is so concerned about other folk's sins. I am not going to do anything either very wicked or dreadful to-day, may it please your holiness. 'Tis true I am going to that seance, or whatever it is, to please our good Aunt Harriet, but not to take part in the thing, and I don't care what they say at home or anywhere else, I'm not going to believe there's any harm in it."

"Why how can you possibly think that?" exclaimed Bessie in amazement as well as

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grief. "You know it is forbidden to attend heretical places of worship. You frighten me, Hattie, by these strange speeches you make here. Surely you never before had these ideas."

"One must always be advancing, getting new ideas you know, if she wants to be anybody in the world," rejoined Hattie, as she adjusted the little hand glass to get a view of the arrangement of her back hair. "Now I'll just tell you I've got one very brilliant new idea since I came here at any rate, and then you can understand about some of the others that seem to give you so much uneasiness. Aunt Harriet's pretty well fixed, I suppose you are already aware; just about how well I have managed to find out in a kind of a chance way. Well, if she wants

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an heir, or more properly an heiress for it all, I am determined to do the friendly act of showing her where to find one. A young lady she'll be quite likely to fancy too, in fact just after her own heart, as near as she can get there. I always hated my name before, but now I consider it exceedingly lucky that I am called Harriet. Every straw counts, you know."

"Oh, but Hattie," breathed her cousin, in a voice fairly awe-struck at the revelation of the young intrigante. "You surely would not think of even pretending to follow auntie's views in regard to religion. You wouldn't seem even to be less devoted to your own for all she is worth ten times over. And remember your mamma and papa

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would not hear to such a thing, were you ever so well disposed for it."

"Well, of course, goosie, I would not want to pose for a brand plucked from the burning—stand up as one of the converted at a Methodist meeting or anything of that sort; but to be obliging, and escort Aunt Harriet to church once in awhile is another thing altogether. And I won't believe either papa or mamma could at all object to that much. If they did, they'd be very foolish, that's all, and they'd pretty soon forget those qualms of conscience when I become mistress of the Storrs bank account and these broad acres. There, now, I guess I'm about ready to listen to those old pious frauds, deacons or elders or whatever you call them, singing psalms through their long Yankee noses.

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How will this do for my appearance during the performance? Will I strike Aunt Hat as a child of promise, and so forth?" and Hattie took a stand before her cousin with hands clasped, eyes rolled up, and mouth drawn down in the most absurd fashion.

"I would not try to impose on poor auntie so for all her money," said Bessie indignantly. "I think it's downright mean, to say nothing of the sin of it, and I, for one, could never enjoy anything I did not come by honestly, and without having to——"

Just then a slight rustle at their door caused both girls to start. Turning to see if any one was in the hall Hattie found the door had been left slightly ajar. No one was about, however, and she concluded that the sound she thought she heard had been

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caused by the draught from the open windows, swinging the unlatched door and causing it to brush against the carpet. With a merry good-by to forlorn looking Bessie and an injunction not to forget her wild cousin in the prayers which in lieu of Mass she was doubtless going to begin, and the promise to return the favor by remembering her in her will some day, Hattie took up fan and gloves and hastened below to join her aunt, whom she found turning over the pages of her Testament as she sat on the veranda awaiting her.

The day was a tedious one to deserted little Bessie. She said her rosary and read the prayers at Mass from the little manual her mother had been careful to send with her; then she wandered aimlessly about the

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house wrapped in its rigid Sunday silence. Lattices were closed and blinds drawn in most of the apartments and the one servant not included in the church-going party, tip-toed about with a regulation Sunday aspect. The audacious locust piping out its shrill note in a neighboring tree, seemed an unscrupulous intruder upon the general solemnity.

At the church Hattie sat demurely through the long service, and patiently endured the numerous introductions and handshakings that followed. It was a little shocking to her to witness the chattering in pews and aisles, the smiling and bowing and gathering about in little groups after the exercises were over, but she smiled too as she remembered the place was, after all but

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a mock church, fitly representative of mock religion. "They do well to call it a 'meeting house,'" she mentally commented, "and I don't wonder now that Catholics are warned so to keep away from such religious shams."

The heads of one of the first families in the aristocratic little hamlet, living near by the church, pressed Mrs. Storrs and her niece to come home with them to dinner and remain for the afternoon service. This arrangement the elder lady finally assented to, and then saying she had a word for the minister, she left Hattie with her friends and made her way to where he stood the center of a group near the chancel. After exchanging salutations she drew him a little aside and said abruptly:

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"Could you come over to tea some evening this week Mr. Harrington. I've two young nieces from Albany making me a summer visit. They're both Romanists by the way, but seem to be of different brands. I'd like you to have a talk with the younger one and draw her out a little. Of course all in good part through, for they're relatives and guests you know."

Mr. Harrington twirled his iron grey side whiskers reflectively. He was a godly man in look and manner, in every respect the ideal preacher.

"So, so, he remarked; well I'll be happy to avail myself of your kind invitation Sister Storrs, say on next Wednesday evening. We'll try; and scatter a seed or two in the

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hearts of those young ladies, and who knows what the harvest may be."

"The elder girl accompanied me this morning and has heard you preach brother, but the other little damsel refused flatly to come. I suspect you'll find it rather difficult getting on with her, but come, try your hand at it anyway. And now I won't detain you; so good morning, we'll be expecting you Wednesday, and Mrs. Harrington, too, if you can persuade her to bring along or tear herself away from those little ones."

The sun was casting long shadows over the lawn as Mrs. Storrs' carriage entered the roadway leading to her own residence. Bessie ran eagerly from the house to meet her aunt and cousin as they alighted from the vehicle. Contrary to the little girl's ap-

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prehension, Mrs. Storrs showed no coldness toward her on account of her declination of the proposal of the morning. So the evening passed pleasantly, Aunt Harriet narrating for Bessie's entertainment various little episodes of the day, and Hattie a trifle morose, listening with polite endurance. Presently the early bed time came, and for the third day with its trials and consolations was of the dead past.

CHAPTER IV.—A LITTLE THEOLOGIAN.

The following Wednesday evening found Rev. Mr. Harrington, punctual to his appointment, seated at Mrs. Storrs' elegantly bespread tea-table. He had just "asked the blessing" after the approved form of his profession, Mrs. Storrs sitting with bowed head, Hattie nervously fingering the napkin in her lap and looking up and down alternately, as though she were uncertain where to turn her gaze in order to best express her devotion. But Bessie, brave little Bessie, simply stood by her chair, said her own grace, making as usual the sign of the Cross before and after, and then seated herself; but not, it must be admitted, without considerable heightened color and careful

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avoidance of a glance at the ministerial face before her.

Presently, however, Mr. Harrington blandly remarked, "Ah, I beg your pardon, Miss Bessie, but you are a Catholic I see; we have not many of your persuasion about these parts."

Bessie scarcely knew how she could venture to converse with this, to her, novel variety of ecclesiastical dignitary, the first of the class she had ever spoken to, but she managed to answer not very confusedly.

"No, I presume not, as there seems to be no church of the kind about Hopedale."

"So Miss Hattie here was fain to honor us with her presence last Sunday," went on the reverend gentleman with a beaming smile on that young lady. "You did not bestow the

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same favor, I believe, Miss Bessie. Now that was rather an injustice all around, I should say."

Bessie looked up at the mildly inquisitive face timidly. She remembered that her refusal to go to church may have really looked like a simple denial of courtesy to her aunt, so she hastened to say apologetically.

"Really, sir, I did not mean it in that way. I should have been very glad to please everybody, and for my own part would far rather have gone to your church than stayed here alone all day, had it not been wrong, that is, sinful I mean, for me to go there."

Mr. Harrington laughed: "Sinful to go to our church—just for a chance visit, even! Well, really, you are complimentary to us, little one."

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Bessie flushed, and then said with some asperity: "I don't wish to be impolite, I assure you, Mr. Harrington, nor cast reflection on the conduct of my cousin, but since you want to know my reasons for not going to your church or seem to have decided upon wrong ones, I must answer truthfully. I did not and cannot go to your church because we Catholics believe there is only one true Church, which is ours, and therefore attendance at others is having to do with false worship, and consequently sinful."

"Indeed, my dear!" said Mr. Harrington, raising his eyebrows, and in fact not a little taken aback by this outspoken statement. "And may I just inquire if you can tell me why you believe your religion right and all the others teachers of false doctrine?"

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After the episode of the preceding Sunday, Bessie had been at pains to think out the reasons why she could not conform to her aunt's wishes in the matter of church-going, and this bit of reflection stood her now in good service. She looked frankly at her reverend opponent and quietly answered:

"Since you ask me, sir, I suppose you mean I shall answer, whether or not I have to make a pleasant reply. As there is but one God, there can be but one right rule for His creatures. This we know is, since our Lord came on earth, the Church He established. And as our Church is this first Christian Church, it must be the right one."

Rev. Mr. Harrington was this time literally dumbfounded, as well he might be, for it is not many girls of fourteen that could present

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such an argument and so well worded. But Bessie Morton was well instructed and had listened attentively to many able sermons. Yet as she spoke, even she, herself, was surprised at the readiness with which some of the arguments now came to her.

But Mr. Harrington, though staggered, did not feel himself worsted. He returned to the attack with a preface of compliment to his plucky little antagonist.

"Bravo! Miss Bessie, why you are quite a little theologian. Too bad now you are of the wrong sex for the pulpit of your church; I'm sure you'd be a real ornament. In sooth I hate to corner you after you've defended your case so bravely; but I would be doing injustice to your bright inquiring mind not to give you a hint that there are certain well-

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established facts of history, of which with your bias of education you have of course not been made aware. These facts prove, my dear, that your original Church is not original at all, that after the time of Christ and the apostolic days, the Christian body became contaminated with errors, and led to unwholesome beliefs and practices, by enthusiasts and individuals, influenced by unscrupulous motives. This state of things, you should know, continued, and disorder ran riot until the primitive Church was revived and reorganized by the rise of the illustrious reformers of the sixteenth century."

Mrs. Storrs was all interest and Hattie's pretty mouth wore an involuntarily scornful curve as the reverend gentleman ceased speaking. Bessie gave a little incredulous laugh and said quickly :

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“Oh, but you are speaking of the Church of Christ, Mr. Harrington. And He gave His word that that Church should be a permanent institution. He said it was the ‘pillar and ground of truth,’ and that He, Himself, would always remain with it. It could not, then, have fallen into error, as you say, as soon as the first Apostles left it. And we know, moreover, that it did not, but that those whom you call ‘Reformers’ in the sixteenth century, were only wicked rebellious persons, who started new systems to further their own bad and selfish ends. I am not old enough and learned enough yet to argue with you on this subject, sir; but I know well the origin and teaching of my religion, and this quite proves it is the right one. I have studied history so far, too, that I know the characters of those who started

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Protestantism and their designs in so doing."

Mr. Harrington would have made a wise general, had the art of war been his profession; he saw plainly where further advance upon the enemy's lines would be more hurt than benefit to his cause, and he knew how to withdraw without declaring weakness.

"Really, my little girl," he remarked patronizingly, "you make me a most opportune reminder, and I confess I owe you much apology. It is true you are quite too young and little versed in theological and historical lore to enter into an equal discussion of these matters. Therefore I will not go on to quote data in testimony of my assertions. I will not expose the methods by which the Church of Rome manages to bolster up her claims to pre-

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cedence in the minds of her adherents. I will not attempt to portray the career of deception and imposition of which from earliest ages she has been guilty—”

“No, please don’t,” interrupted Bessie, with ludicrous deprecation. “Because if you succeeded in that, you see, our Lord’s word must have failed and we’d have to reject Him, and go back beyond Him to look for the truth, if indeed, we might then hope to find it anywhere.”

Whether Mrs. Storrs thought the debate was becoming rather too warm to be agreeable as table talk, or whatever her motives, she broke in upon it at this juncture, pleasantly calling the disputants to order.

“Come, come,” she said laughing, “this is getting rather too deep for your audience, my good friends. Hadn’t you better postpone it

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till the court studies up the law in the case? I'd like to act as judge when you reach conclusions, and as I don't know much about the history, etc., in contention, I must beg you'll give me a little time to look up those events. Meantime let me help you to some more of this chicken salad, Brother Harrington. I think you'll find it a pleasanter subject to discuss just at present."

Brother Harrington bowed and thanked his hostess with some little anxiety as to whether her last words implied a sarcasm on his championship and argument in defending "reformed truth," Bessie looked at her plate very intently, her red cheeks growing redder as she perceived that in her earnestness she had left her supper yet untasted. Hattie was eyeing all parties askance and wondering intensely

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what remarkable finale would occur. Nothing of this kind happened however; Mrs. Storrs promptly turned the conversation to commonplace topics, and so adroitly did she manage that soon all were quite at their ease again. Sociability reigned uninterrupted for the rest of the evening; Mr. Harrington remaining to be entertained with music by the girls for an hour after supper.

CHAPTER V.—GATES AJAR.

The remaining weeks of the young folks' stay passed without incident of moment. Hattie was all complaisance to her aunt, but Bessie threatened so positively to notify her parents that she did not again venture so far as to go to church with her. The next Sunday she felt herself reduced to offer the excuse of a severe headache, and the Sunday again succeeding so violent a rainstorm set in in the morning that Mrs. Storrs herself had no thought of going out. Before another Sabbath came around the visitors had made their homeward journey.

Weeks merged into months, and the episodes of that summer were well nigh forgotten by

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both the girls. They exchanged letters with their aunt occasionally, of course; Hattie especially proving a prompt and effusive correspondent. It was just before the Christmas holidays that Mrs. Morton was a second time startled by a communication from her aunt; this time addressed and delivered directly to herself. After a brief preface it read:

"Well I have what I guess I can call a big and pleasant surprise in store for all of you. The fact is, Caroline, I am about to become a Catholic, and for reasons you will see later on I think it but right to communicate this to you most directly.

"When I opened correspondence with you and Sybil last summer, and urged your girls to make me a visit, I had a deeper purpose in view than I fancy any of you ever dreamed: I am, as I said then, getting pretty well advanced in years, not far from the allotted three score and ten now, you know, and I wanted to be at peace with all my friends, but yet more I longed to be at peace with

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God, with my own conscience; I wanted to find a system of religion that could offer me a consciousness of security I had never yet experienced. With what had been the profession of my life, I had never been satisfied, and the other sects of Protestantism I knew were but variations of the same principles. I understood fully that Catholicism now knocked at my door, demanding at least an entrance for examination. You know, however, the prejudices that in my mind barred the way to its admission. For awhile I turned a deaf ear to its pleading, then suddenly occurred to me the idea of at least taking some personal observation of the working of the religion, its influence upon the lives of others. It had always been represented to me, of course, that Catholics were brought up blind, unreasoning, stupid in matters of religious belief, that they literally knew nothing about the why or wherefore of their profession. I argued that the state of mind of your girls would certainly enlighten me on this point and perhaps farther, so I sent for them, resolving to draw them out in such an adroit manner that they would not suspect I was quizzing them at all, or took any interest in their belief. I carried out the

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program and with the most perfect results. From Hattie, it is true, I could learn nothing; she would indeed have been a sad stumbling block in my pathway, had not your little girl, God bless her, ably helped me over the difficulty. Had it not been, too, for a bit of eavesdropping I was guilty of one Sunday morning when I listened at the door of their room to Bessie's remonstrance against Hattie's going to church with me and so discovered the motive of the latter's remarkable complaisance in this and other matters. That conversation brought down in my mind the balance in which Catholicity had weighed so lightly; but the turn of the scale in its favor was decided by a later discussion which I brought about between your little girl and our minister. When the children went home, I wrote at once to the priest who did duty in our neighborhood, asking his direction and aid in obtaining due knowledge of the doctrines and practices of the Church. He sent me books of instruction; visited me a number of times and now pronounces me ready for admission to the one True Fold I have so long unconsciously pined for. I am thinking of going

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to Albany for the ceremony of reception; write and tell me that I shall be welcome among you."

It would be vain to try to describe the welcome accorded her, the joy of all on that never-to-be-forgotten Christmas day when the aged pilgrim came home for the first time to her Father's house, from which she had so long wandered afar. Hattie's dire humiliation and little Bessie's just but modest exultation might also be dwelt upon, but we must pass all this and on to the later events of importance.

Aunt Harriet returned home after the holidays and the families of her nieces settled down to their old routine, until early the following summer another important letter was received from the good old lady, urging their fathers and all to come to Hopedale on a visit of combined business and pleasure. Arrange-

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ments were speedily made, not without some difficulty on the part of the two hard-working men, and on arrival they found, to their delight, that they had been called to assist at the dedication of a handsome little Catholic church Mrs. Storrs had built between her home and the village. The church was dedicated in honor of Bessie's patroness, St. Elizabeth, and its erection and certain other inducements offered by Mrs. Storrs had drawn so many Catholic families into the neighborhood that the place was supplied with a resident pastor.

But this was not all the business Mrs. Storrs had to transact with her relatives. At the close of the day of the church ceremonial she announced her intention, if agreeable, to at once establish Mr. Reynolds in his accustomed

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business in the village, and to have the Mortons come to live with her, Mr. Morton as general overseer of her property. To the Reynolds she offered also a pretty little residence somewhat nearer the village.

It is needless to say that all these generous tenders were most joyfully accepted, and the succeeding autumn found our friends happily settled in their new homes, with Hattie and Bessie off at school at one of the best academies.

Three years later, just as the two girls were about to close their school life, they were suddenly called home to attend the deathbed of their kind benefactress. They reached Hopedale, however, only to find good Aunt Harriet at rest since the evening before. The day after her funeral, as was customary, all

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the presumptive heirs being assembled in the parlor of the old homestead, the reading of her will occurred.

To the Reynolds the testatrix left their home and Mr. Reynolds' store, with the capital therein invested, and five thousand dollars to each of the children. The Mortons received the old homestead and a number of acres of land adjoining, with bequests to the children of the family the same as to the Reynolds. But the principal legatee, the heiress of stocks, bonds and property amounting to over half a million, was, so the document ran, "my well beloved niece, Elizabeth Morton, who will, I am sure, dispense a just proportion of the income arising therefrom to the charities with whose needs and merits I am not acquainted. I give to my niece, Elizabeth Morton afore-

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said, all I own and possess, above the bequests mentioned, as a slight acknowledgment of my great indebtedness to her. I open for her the gate of wealth who set ajar for me the portal of Paradise."

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